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'Mayor' Lanzillo leaves Wellesley Roche Bros.

By Elana Zak/Townsman staff
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Rarely was the longtime store manager seen in his office. Instead, he chose to walk the aisles of the supermarket, chatting briefly with customers and making sure they found everything they needed. During the holidays, he was frequently seen loading groceries into plastic bags. Yet in a move that came with little warning, the store manager was transferred from the Wellesley supermarket to a new one in Easton. His last day at the Linden Square store was Saturday, Sept. 13.

"He's been there forever," Roche Bros. customer Adele Langevin said. "I said goodbye to him on Saturday. It was tearful for both of us."

A manager at the Wellesley Roche Bros. for almost 15 years, Lanzillo was switched to the Easton store to bring his experience to the new location and hopefully help it become as successful as the one in Wellesley, said Rick Roche, CEO and co-owner of Roche Bros. He said it was unusual for a manager to stay at one Roche Bros. as long as Lanzillo did before being transferred.

"People like Danny are a great asset to have," Roche said, adding they both started working at the Wellesley Roche Bros. during the early 1980s in the produce section. "In our new location [we're] hoping he can accomplish there what he has done over the years in Wellesley. He's got a great relationship with the customers and the community. Not everyone has that."

Wellesley resident Renate Olsen has been shopping at the store since 1981. She said she was shocked when Lanzillo, whom she calls the "mayor of Wellesley," approached her last week to tell her he was leaving.

"He shook my hand and said, 'I just want to tell you it has been a pleasure to serve you and I am leaving,' and tears were coming out of his eyes," she said. "I was annoyed because it doesn't seem fair that when someone does such a good job he's being sent off to somewhere else to do another good job."

Olsen and Langevin were so upset Lanzillo was leaving they sent e-mails to Ed Roche, the company's president. Other customers also complained. In two days, Roche responded, explaining Lanzillo was leaving to help the Easton store flourish, like Wellesley's had.

"As a part of our business, we sometimes transfer managers, but not without a lot of thought," Roche wrote in his e-mail. "Dan has a wonderful rapport with the Wellesley community, and we certainly recognize that he is also a terrific leader who builds a team atmosphere with the associates in his store. Dan is unquestionably a very special part of our team, and his talents are very valuable to us."

While both Olsen and Langevin will continue to shop at the Roche Bros., they said they will miss Lanzillo's presence. He was always willing to help a customer out, said Langevin. She recalled how, many years ago, a stray shopping cart hit and dented her car while it was parked in the Roche Bros. parking lot. Upon telling Lanzillo what had happened, she said she was pleasantly surprised by his reaction. He apologized for the accident and told her to send him the bill.

"He's just been the face of Roche Bros. to Wellesley," she said.